

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 18: Repentance

Last time: *Faith is a gift of God working in us. It becomes our response to God's act of salvation where we ascent, receive, and rest to the truths of the gospel.*

Which comes first repentance or faith?

"It is an unnecessary question...There is no priority. The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance." John Murray

Errors in Understanding Repentance

1. Penance

The 4th Century Latin translation of the Bible created a critical error in translating "Repent!" as "Do penance!"

The Roman Catholic teaching on penance is very far from biblical repentance. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church penance requires that you must recall and orally confess each sin you've committed. Then a priest determines a suitable action to perform to make satisfaction for the sin. Only then can you be forgiven.

Discovering this translation error in the 16th Century was key to the Protestant Reformation.

2. Modern Problems

Modern Christians confuse repentance with a new effort to obey. They make the changed heart a prerequisite to faith. Obedience is a result not a condition of justification.

"Some Christians struggle to the point of despair over whether the quality and degree of their repentance is adequate for them to be forgiven as if repentance were the ground of forgiveness and the former could be measured by the intensity of emotion, resolve, and victory over specific sins." Michael Horton

- Rick Downs, *"If you promise to do better, then Christ is of no value to you, and you have no need for Jesus."*

WCF 15.3. *Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.*

Gospel Repentance

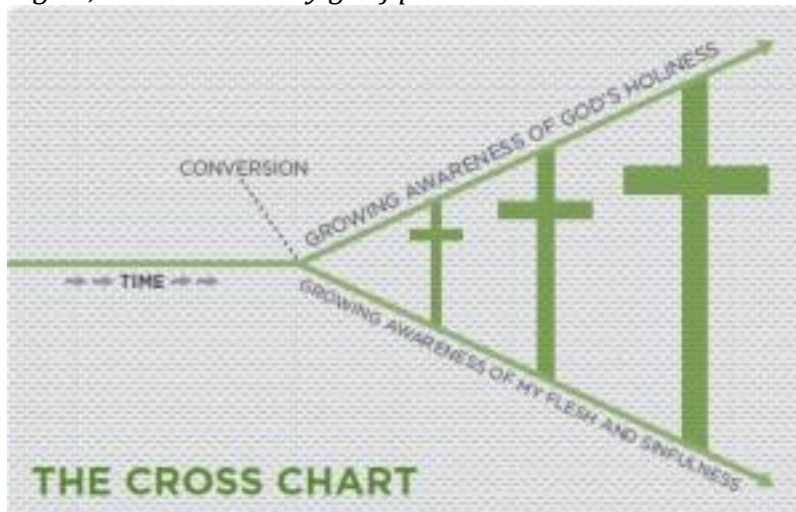
WCF 15.1 *Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.*

Repentance is not changing a behavior here or there; it is the hatred of our sinful condition, turning away from our old life toward new life in Christ.

“Legal” repentance is not Christian repentance. It expresses only fear of judgment and punishment and bears no fruit.

Groveling can be a form of legalism. To say, “I am a wretch and God doesn’t love me” is holding ourselves as victims and excusing ourselves from having to live with integrity.

2 Corinthians 7:10 *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*



Worldly repentance is crushing and will lead to despair. Gospel repentance is a life-giving grace. It involves turning away from sin and self-trust to reliance on Christ.

Repentance is not biblical unless it includes Christ’s work of redemption. True repentance ends with joy and thanksgiving, not despair.

Repentance as a Grace?

Repentance is a grace because it connects us to Christ. We turn from sin to Christ.

WCF 15.2 By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.

WCF 15.4 As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.

WCF 15.5. *Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly.*

Repentance for Life

How do you grow as a Christian? What answers do we give to young Christians who want to grow?

A new Christian wants to grow in his faith. We get him into a discipleship program. We should tell him to practice every day believing the gospel. You need to practice every day going to God and repenting; and repenting in the context of faith; and believing the gospel in the context of repentance.

We tend to believe that obedience comes from a rigorous application of the law or our traditions. God is the one who does the changing in our lives. We need to adhere ourselves to Jesus by faith and repentance, and he is going to work in me.

God wants a broken heart. Repentance is a matter of coming before God Himself. Seeing our sin and rejoicing in the gospel. Change becomes almost an **activity that we observe** rather than an **activity we perform**.

Describe a recent "repentance" that was just a form of pain relief—an attempt to 'get it over with' as quickly as possible.

Which counterfeit repentance do you often confuse with genuine repentance?

- Changing your outward behavior
- Making promises or resolutions
- Groveling
- Engaging in self-pity
- Beating yourself up
- Offering a sacrifice
- Having a brilliant observation or insight about yourself or your sins

Why are these detrimental to your faith?

Public Repentance

WCF 15.6. *As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy; so, he that scandalizeth his brother, or the church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

“Confess your faults to one another” (James 5:16.) He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners...so we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!”

Bonhoeffer calls this the “*final break-through to fellowship.*” It is the only way we can honestly function as a church family, when we can own up to that label.

Why is it necessary to confess before others? What happens when we don’t?

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Repentance is a grace that leads us to greater dependence on Christ. Repentance is not a work that earns our salvation.